

Walters predicted Wall's fall, unity

By Richard Murphy
REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

BONN, Germany — On the wall of Ambassador Vernon Walters' Bonn office hangs a framed newspaper article in which a distinguished American journalist takes him to task for predicting Germany will soon be united.

The article is dated September 1989. Two months later the Berlin Wall was opened. East Germany's communist regime started to collapse, and by October of the following year the two Germanys were one.

Mr. Walters, the veteran U.S. envoy who retires next month "for the second or third time," says he sensed unification was coming even before he was sent to West Germany in April 1989.

"To me, it was clear when the Soviets evacuated Afghanistan that the Brezhnev doctrine was no longer in effect — that is that the Red Army would march in to prop up unpopular governments against their own people," he said in an interview.

"The actual opening of the Wall came as a little bit of a surprise to me, but the rest of the procedure did not."

The ambassador, a burly 74-year-old soldier-diplomat who was previously U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, says his 2½ years in Germany were among the most extraordinary of his life.

"Normally it doesn't come to anybody of my age to be present at events like the fall of the Wall, German unity. ... That's an extraordinary climax on which to leave," he said.

Twelve years an Army general and 10 years an ambassador, Mr. Walters worked for almost every U.S. administration over more than four decades in both high-profile and undercover roles.

Fluent in seven languages — French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch and Russian — he was deputy director of the CIA for four years.

He admits that his plain-spokenness — in whatever language

— has occasionally given his State Department colleagues sleepless nights but says it has not seriously damaged his career.

His prediction that Germany would soon unite, denounced as irresponsible by some German politicians, gave him a high profile that he maintained through his term in the country.

On the verge of departure, the ambassador advises Germans not to let their Nazi past weigh on them too much as their united country adjusts to its new role in the world.

"I always say to them: 'Detest Hitler, detest everything he did, never forget it. But don't become obsessed with this as if this was your only history. This was 12 years of 2,000 years of German history.'"

He urges Germany to play the role of a fully sovereign state and is skeptical of the prevailing view that Germany's post-war constitution prevents it from deploying its soldiers outside the NATO area. This was the reason Germany gave for not committing its forces to the U.S.-led Gulf War effort.

"You know, I read that constitution awfully closely. I've not been able to find the article which has to be changed."

The Washington Post _____
The New York Times _____
The Washington Times A9
The Wall Street Journal _____
The Christian Science Monitor _____
New York Daily News _____
USA Today _____
The Chicago Tribune _____

Date 16 Aug 1991